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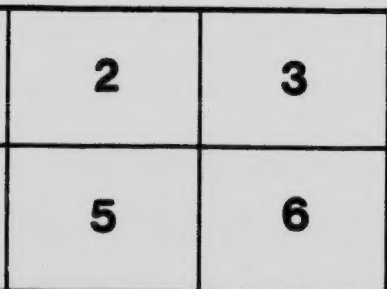
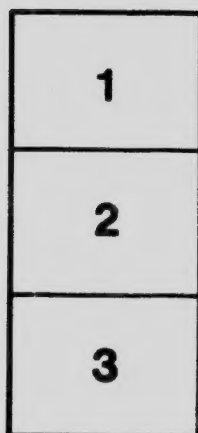
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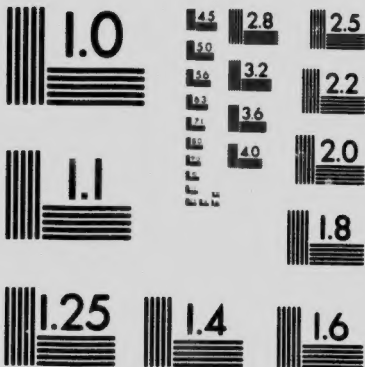
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NATIVE CHRISTIAN COLPORTEURS  
—  
THE UPPER CANADA RELIGIOUS



ORTEURS WORKING IN CENTRAL CHINA

— FOR —

RELIGIOUS TRACT AND BOOK SOCIETY

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THE

# Upper Canada Tract Society

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## Colportage Work in Central China

BY NATIVE CHRISTIAN COLPORTEURS.

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THE late Wm. Gooderham very generously left a legacy of \$10,000 to the Society to extend its most important work. After careful consideration by the Board of Directors, and after much correspondence, it was finally agreed to devote the yearly interest of the above sum to Foreign Mission work in Central China, to be carried on by the very best native Christian converts, working as colporteurs among their own countrymen. The work has been entrusted to The Central China Religions Tract Society, with headquarters at Hankow: and in connection with that Society the Rev. Dr. Griffith John, one of the best known missionaries in China, and with him a small Committee of representative missionaries, have very kindly agreed to select thoroughly trustworthy men as Colporteurs, and to direct them in their work and report to our Society. Four such men have already been selected, and are now actively at work, one from the Methodist Mission and three from the London Missionary Society. With much pleasure we present the photographs of three of these colporteurs.

By the following Report it will be seen that Colportage Work in Central China is one of very great difficulty and danger. There are millions in China who have never heard of a Saviour, and to reach these: Colportage Work, by native Christian colporteurs, is one of the most practical and successful agencies. These men are at home in their own country, and are thoroughly familiar with all the social, religious and home life of their countrymen, and thus their work can be carried on most economically and effectively.

About \$75 per year will pay the salary of a thoroughly efficient colporteur. Any sums specially given for this purpose will be heartily received and carefully devoted to this Foreign Mission Work.

The Board of Directors most earnestly trust that this new and important addition to the work of the Tract Society will call forth deeper interest in its Mission Work, both home and foreign: that it will be followed with great sympathy and very much earnest prayer, and that it will be abundantly blessed by the Holy Spirit.

## OUR COLPORTEURS IN CENTRAL CHINA

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The subject of this report would at first sight seem prosaic enough to justify the waste paper basket method of happy despatch. It is only the record of the labours of four colporteurs in Central China, and within the dull routine of their daily bookselling there could surely have been very little room for incident and adventure. Those, however, who read this story to the end will learn that the work of a colporteur in this part of China involves not only perseverance and consecration, but that in the face of certain risks and perils it calls forth real heroism and daring. The life of a Christian colporteur in China is, under any circumstances, a very trying one. He is a lonely man, and has to stand the brunt of constant ridicule and petty persecution. Unless he is wise and patient, courteous and of good address, he is not likely to dispose of many books. It is needless, surely, after this description of the ideal colporteur, to remark that such men are not to be found here as thick as blackberries, unless, indeed, it be the blackberries of these parts, which are few and far between.

### FOUR FRONT RANK MEN.

At the beginning of this year the committee of the Central China Religious Tract Society set about organizing a new branch of their work. Having gratefully accepted the generous offer of the Upper Canada Religious Tract and Book Society to devote the annual interest of the Gooderham legacy to the support of several colporteurs, to labour under their superintendence, the question naturally arose, What about *men*? Are the right *men* to be found? God had been preparing the hearts of some of His servants for this enterprise, and in March *four* suitable men began work. By and by, when things are more settled in China, we hope to appoint *at least as many more*. In the meantime a good beginning has been made. One of the four men engaged is a member of the Wesleyan mission; the others are all members of the London Mission, in Hankow.

All these men have thus far justified their appointment. They are all good men, and two of them have had an interesting history. Chen Chuin San, a tall, strong man, was formerly a bad man, and a bitter persecutor of Christians; especially was he a foe to the Christian members of his own family. On one occasion, in his own village, he attacked his cousin, a man of sterling Christian character, with so much violence that but for the interference of bystanders he would have beaten him almost to death. Many a time since Chuin San himself became a Christian he has, by his meekness under persecution, excited the surprise of his neighbours, who in the old days used to go in

fear of him. As a Christian he has often been beaten by the heathen. On one occasion he visited a market town to preach the Gospel and sell books, when the people gathered against him, beat him, and cast him out with the threat that if he ever returned for the purpose of preaching they would "gouge out his eyes." "Well," was his reply, "I shall be here again to-morrow." And so he was. His adversaries did not carry out their terrible threat on that day, but contented themselves with giving him another beating and renewing the threat. The next morning this sturdy fellow was at his post again, and so he continued to go, day after day, patiently enduring all the persecution and all the ridicule directed against him, until by his continual going he wearied them and by his meekness he won a hearing for his message.

Peng Lang Seng, a native of Hunan, is a man of strong character and decidedly original. He not only has ideas about things in general which are thoroughly characteristic, but he does not hesitate to carry these ideas into practice. Until his conversion to God a few years ago, he was a notoriously bad man, and was well known as such in both Hankow and Changsha. He is a striking example of the power of the Gospel to change the hearts of even the worst men, and his constant testimony to the grace of God, in saving so great a sinner from his iniquity, is always powerful and convincing. He is absolutely fearless in proclaiming the Gospel.

#### A STRANGE FUNERAL.

Not long since Peng's brother died, much to the grief of Peng himself and his aged mother. At once Peng determined to seize the opportunity to prove to the heathen the falsity of their rumours about the evil doings of foreign missionaries and their native converts. The Chinese, even the enlightened ones, believe that the most potent medicines of our Pharmacopeia are compounded of the eyes, hearts, &c., of human beings. The demand for these things leads, it is supposed, not only to the desecration of the dead, but also to the injury of the living. Outside the Christian Church there are comparatively few Chinese who do not believe this to be true. Peng resolved that no such stories should be circulated about his brother. He announced all through the neighbourhood that his deceased brother would be placed in the coffin in the presence of all who cared to witness the ceremony. At the time appointed a large crowd gathered, and were present during the burial service which was read in the house. Then four Hunanese acquaintances, all heathen, undertook to examine the body, to place it reverently in the coffin and to fasten the lid down with the cement usually employed, and to make it more secure by driving in a number of huge nails provided for the purpose. When this was going on Peng and his friends left the house and went away to a distance, returning only when all was finished. It required much moral courage to do all this, but it has probably done more good than a thousand proclamations and assurances that all the rumors referred to are baseless. For some days Peng's doings were the talk of all that part of Hankow. Fung Ta Shien and Tan Shioh San are the other two members of the band of colporteurs.

In appointing these brethren it was felt that all of them being capable preachers and experienced Christian men, they might in their journeys render a service of immense value to the Christian Church in Central China, and of scarcely secondary importance to their main work. A large number of the converts of the various missions return to their homes in distant places where they are surrounded by many temptations, and where, moreover, they are cut off from Christian fellowship. Christians so circumstanced have been lost sight of for months and even years, and many have continued steadfast in the faith, notwithstanding the terrible isolation, while some have drawn their friends about them and are already forming little Christian communities in the midst of heathen neighbours. It has long been felt that these Christians should from time to time be visited, strengthened and encouraged. During the past three months the colporteurs have done much good work in this direction while on their journeys. In many places the hearts of lonely Christians have been cheered by such unexpected visits. Who can estimate the good work thus accomplished?

#### WORK IN A SNOWSTORM.

In one of their earlier journeys two of the colporteurs were overtaken by a heavy snowstorm in Mien Yang. After much fruitless wandering they managed to reach the home of a Christian family; there they received a hearty welcome. The snow kept them prisoners for several days, and most of the time was spent in Bible study with the Christians, and in teaching more than twenty of the neighbours who assembled several times a day to hear the "doctrine." It was a blessed snowstorm which kept our brethren weather-bound and gave them the splendid opportunity which they used to so much advantage. This Christian family living in the midst of heathen is a continual testimony to the value of medical Missionary work. Five members of the family have successively suffered from cataract, and have all been successfully operated upon in the London Mission Hospital, Hankow. The sixth is not yet mature for operation, but his turn will come before long, and it is hoped that he, too, will be able to testify, as the others already do, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see."

#### A TRUE WOMAN.

Some months before that time a daughter of the family had left her home to become the wife of the young man to whom she was betrothed by her parents in early childhood. It was stipulated that she should be free to profess Christianity, yet no sooner did the young bride become an inmate of the family home of her husband, and it was apparent she would not worship idols than her father-in-law and husband began to beat her. This they continued to do whenever she knelt to pray to God. Many Christians in more highly favoured surroundings find no necessity for such an added temptation to laxity. This poor girl stood to her colours bravely, and continued her praying. The colporteurs paid a visit to the family, and we have since learnt



that there has been no further persecution. This was a most useful service to the whole family, as well as to the young disciple of Christ herself.

A day or two later the brethren unexpectedly lighted upon a man who became a Christian eight years ago, and who had not been heard of for some time. Although in great distress, his house having recently been burned to the ground, he and all his family were bright, and the neighbours spoke highly of his character.

### STRIKING CONTRASTS

It would be easy to multiply instances of this kind, for our four brethren return to us full of such interesting facts as have been given. Many who had heard the Gospel in Hankow, or at one or other of the chapels where daily preaching is carried on, or at one of the hospitals, were met with and others were visited in their homes. In the inns where they sojourned, on boats and by the way, they constantly met with those who had become interested in the Truth in Hankow, to whom, in many cases, they taught the word of God more fully.

As a contrast to this, two brethren lately travelled to the north of this Province, through a well populated district, visiting on their way *twenty-eight* market towns and cities, during which journey they did not meet with a single Christian. These great stretches of darkness make us realize how much land has still to be possessed. One interesting fact which came to light was that all along the way their books were well known, at least the *titles* were—a large number of the people already possessing one or more copies which they brought out triumphantly to exhibit. A few had gathered a general idea of the main teachings of Christianity. Such testimony is valuable in many ways. It proves that tract distribution does really succeed in getting Christian books into the hands of the people; that the books are mostly preserved; and, best of all, it shows that there is ground for earnest prayer on the part of all Christians that God would bless the seed thus widely scattered.

### THE BIBLE IN CHANGSHA.

Early in March, Peng Lan Seng and Tan Shioh San started off on a journey to Changsha, the capital of the Province of Hunan. They were fully aware of the great risk they ran in attempting to distribute their books in that bitterly anti-foreign centre. After a protracted journey they reached their destination, and after reconnoitering and making enquiries for a couple of days they boldly sallied forth on the third day to make the attack. Providentially it rained, and as they passed from house to house so well screened were they by their large umbrellas that they attracted very little attention. Ten days,—anxious, worrying days they must have been—were spent in this house-to-house work, in which they managed to sell at least one book at eight out of every ten houses, a splendid feat of book-selling anywhere, and especially so in Changsha. Peng, himself, a native of Changsha, has many friends there, some in good positions, through whom he and his colleague were introduced

to several leaders of society, and were entertained at a feast on more than one occasion. On the 11th day the boldest step of all was taken. These two daring fellows started out, armed with handsome packets of Christian books, suitably inscribed, and with the visiting cards of Dr. Griffith John and myself, and made their way to the Yamen of the Governor of the Province. They respectfully presented a packet of books and the cards, but the books were declined with thanks. From there they went to a number of other Yamens, and presented packets of books to *eighteen* of the high officials and leading gentry. This was literally going into the lion's den, and but for their openness and courage these men would certainly have been seized and beaten, if not worse. The strain upon their nerves was intense but they got through capitally. Both men showed great courage in carrying out this plan of attack, which was due to Peng, he having conceived it.

### AN IDOL UPROAR.

Three days after they left, the city was in a tremendous uproar. It was discovered early one morning that the principal god of the city temple had been smashed, and the eyes dug out with a sharp instrument. Other idols had also been mutilated and great was the popular indignation. Just before the close of the late war, a special commissioner of high rank was sent from Peking to seek the good help of this god against the Japanese. It will thus be seen that it was a terrific blow against idolatry which struck out the eyes of this noted idol. Who could have committed this great crime? For a few days Changsha was in a storm of excitement and passion. The thirty or more priests in charge of the temple were arrested and thrown into prison for not taking better care of their idol, although they protested that the damage was inflicted at night, "while they slept" by supernatural and demoniacal agency. The mystery was deepened by the fact that robbery was evidently not the motive. In Hunan the people believe more strongly in their idols than is the case in other parts of China, and they prove their faith by their works. The temples of Hunan are richer, and the images are more beautifully decorated than elsewhere. The injured idol is very richly adorned, while in addition he carries a large amount of wealth in what might be called by courtesy his inner man, which would be beyond the power of human millionaires. The interior treasury of this god contained much silver and gold, and two pearls of priceless value, so it is said. These treasures were not disturbed by the mysterious iconoclast, nor were the rich adornments carried away. What could have been the motive? That still remains to all of us a mystery. It is stated that a man, who was said to be mad, confessed to having done the deed; his professed object being to remove the chief obstacle in the way of foreigners coming to settle in Hunan, and for his work he hoped to receive a large reward from them. It seems that this idol is the guardian of Hunan against the incursion of barbarians, so this method was employed in order to divest him of his power. Once the power of this idol was broken, foreigners could go and come to Hunan as they pleased. It was evidently a deeply laid scheme to rouse popular hatred once more against foreigners, and was probably

part of a still wider scheme. The man who confessed to the deed, a leather seller, gave the names of numerous members of the Guild as accomplices and principals. These unfortunate, and probably innocent, men have been shamefully ill-used by the officials and almost ruined.\* A good deal is accounted for by the fact that the man who confessed lives in the vicinity of Chou Han, the famous (or infamous) author of the anti-foreign literature to which most of the riots and troubles of late can be traced. It seemed possible that in connection with the treaty of peace Hunan would be opened up; the literature was almost played out, hence this new scheme. It is the old story over again. The duplicity and falsity of the Chinese official classes is the root from which all these evils spring. But a terrible day of reckoning must come before long.

A determined effort was made to drag Christians into the business, so as to lay the blame on them. A leather seller in Hankow, well known in Changsha, was supposed to be a Christian, and a warrant was issued by the authorities for his arrest. He escaped, but his cousin was taken and imprisoned as a surety. The former, Wei Teh Wing, was for years a consistent Christian, but had to be cut off from the Church on account of the opium smoking habit. He has never been in Hunan in his life. Wei Teh Shuin, the cousin, is a Christian in good standing, and when he was thrown into prison without reason, it became possible for us to help. By the good offices of the British consul he was released, after having passed nearly three weeks in a filthy room where a number of prisoners were herded together and never allowed to pass the door. Wei spent most of his time in telling the Gospel story to his fellow-prisoners, one of whom had bought a New Testament before entering, in order to pass the time. Wei Teh Wing has come out of his hiding place and is in the hospital for the cure of opium; his wife and family are full of joy. Wei Teh Shuin is out of prison, and, on the whole, the kingdom of evil bids fair to lose in this struggle. Through all the strifes and tears of men God's Spirit is working out His high purposes of love. Great are the resources of the Enemy, but though he may succeed in keeping God's messengers for a time out of some parts of the world, we know that God will soon ratify His gift to His Son of the "heathen for an inheritance."

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In a later letter the Rev. A. Bonsey, the Superintendent of our Chinese Colportage Work writes: "You will be glad to learn that the Changsha officials have now declared that the idol-breaking had no connection with either the poor, ruined leather sellers or with the Christian Church. The reformed opium smoker and all his family now attend services, and he is a truly changed man. However, this trial has been the means of leading his wife into the Truth, and henceforth she will be a help to him rather than a hindrance, as she formerly used to be."

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Dr. Moffatt, Secretary of the Tract Society, is always heartily glad to supply the pulpits of Ministers who may be sick or away on holidays, and address Christian Endeavour and Missionary Societies, presenting the many sided Mission work of the Society.

Address —

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